

YAMAHA XJ750

Surprise

PACKAGE

Don't be fooled by the US styling. Yamaha's shaft drive XJ750 'Seca' will match much sportier bikes in handling and performance. It does just about everything with flair, says Bob Berry.



Basically an enlarged XJ650 four cylinder engine.

RIGHT: short wheelbase and an upright riding position but the Seca can hold its own in the handling stakes.

THIS was fun. Cruising along at the US legal limit of 55 mph, visor up, on a glorious August Sunday. Sitting upright with arms comfortably outstretched to the high bars.

It made a pleasant change to be able to peer over the hedgerows and stone walls of the Northamptonshire countryside. Humming along past stately Rushton Hall and gazing over the rolling estate grounds. "Lazee Sundee afternoon, got not time to worry..."

The bike was an XJ750 Yamaha Seca, a 1981 import owned by reader Gary Hesom who had emailed me some weeks before asking if we had ever featured this bike because he had trouble finding information about it.

The response was to ask him if we could test his bike. He replied that it wasn't in 'as new' condition but that's no problem for us - we like to test real bikes that are used. It's not a concours contest.

Gary's a lorry driver and a member of the Territorial Army. He was called up to spend three months in Iraq where he delivered tank engines to the troops in the second line, one back from the war front. He'd recently returned and agreed to drop off the bike on his way from Walsall to a wedding reception in Guildford where he was reuniting with mates he made during his war stint.

Sunday morning he and his wife turned up at the Old Bakery to repossess his Seca. But first the picture session and the road test.

EARLY MODEL

THE Seca was launched in America in 1981 so Gary's bike is one of the very first. The Yanks loved its hi-tech specification and style so much that demand soon outstripped supply and it wasn't until the following year that we got it in the UK.

There again, the Seca - its name taken from the Laguna Seca circuit in California - was designed specifically for the US market while we got the XJ650 with sportier styling.

But both bikes were eagerly welcomed by bike scribes on both sides of the Atlantic and one American bike magazine launched a campaign to get the 650 sold there. Yamaha even went a step further and sold the 750 with the 650's styling in Japan. Talk about mixing and matching...

But it wasn't a matter of Yamaha having two almost identical bikes in their range. UK riders could choose between the revvy 650 or the smooth, torquey and better equipped Seca.

The first thing you notice is the console with its computerised check panel between speedo and rev counter. Turn on the ignition and it flashes up checks on side stand, brakes, oil, battery, headlamp (which is on all the time anyway in the States), tail light and even fuel. Very BMW. And it still worked fine on Gary's bike after 22 years - much to his surprise.

In 1982 the Seca cost £2025 and the spec was impressive. That digital display, Yamaha's torque-boosting Induction Control System, hydraulically operated anti-







LEFT TO RIGHT: oblique four into one aftermarket exhaust; two valves per each of the four cylinders; multi-adjustable rear shock absorbers.

dive (okay, it's been rubbished since then but we didn't know that then), air assisted front forks, cast alloy wheels, rear shocks with nine adjustments...

That makes it even better value today at Gary's asking price of £850 for the bike when we tested

it. Don't bother ringing, by the way, he since tells us it's been sold to part-finance the purchase of a Yamaha 600 Fazer.

The aforementioned YICS is well known to Yamaha riders

today but it's worth reminding ourselves of how it works after 22 years. Yamaha plumbed in secondary inlet ports which entered the main inlet tracts just above the inlet valve seats.

The incoming charge is aimed to create controlled turbulence inside the combustion chamber. The secondary ports were only a quarter of the size of the main tracts, so the charge from them entered at a faster rate, forcing the main charge to follow the same circular motion.

This also aids petrol consumption and tests of the day reported best figures of over 51 mpg and worst of 40.

And the streamlined engine with generator and starter motor located behind the barrels, certainly performs well with the ability to pull away from 2000 rpm in top (fifth) gear. Play with the gearbox and although not blistering fast, the Seca responds immediately from 4000 up to the red line at 9500.

Cruising out towards Rutland for our test session I upped the pace to 65/70 mph and immediately noticed an irritating vibration coming through the stepped seat. Just at the top end of the speed limit and what should be the comfortable cruising speed. Knocking it back just 500 rpm caused the tingling to go away - as did going faster. Strange, for a bike built for comfort.

Apparently, Yamaha rubber-mounted the XJ650's engine for us, but not the Seca's. Isolastic bushes support the rear of the engine but the front is solidly mounted. Odd, then, that the vibration appeared to be coming from the back of the bike!

One road test of the day reported that a pillion passenger lost all feeling in his feet after a 20 minute ride at 65 mph. The 81 bhp motor is basically the same as the 650 with two valves per cylinder and twin camshafts. The extra capacity was gained by adding two mm to the bore and 1.6 mm to the stroke.

Which brings us neatly to the Seca's





Yamaha fitted the shaft drive from their X5750 triple.

transmission. Yamaha turned to Porsche in Germany to design the shaft drive used on their X5750 triple and that was transplanted into the Seca.

And it's so good you couldn't tell the difference between it and chain drive with non of the snatching at low speeds associated with some competitors. Spur gears provide the primary drive and make a turbine-like whine, a not all at unpleasant sound.

SURPRISE PACKAGE

BUT if cruising along in serene comfort (apart from the irritating vibration patch) is the Seca's

main forte, it performs just as well in the 'scratching' stakes. It was quite a surprise to head back home along a favourite stretch of fast, smooth, long bends and put the bike to the test.

It simply soaked up the twists, turning eagerly and flicking up from left to right effortlessly. An MCN road test of the day reported that 'handling is near perfection'. Well I wouldn't go as far as that but it is certainly impressive.

The wheelbase is short at 56.8 inches and there's plenty of ground clearance with those stylish pipes swept upwards and the short footrests tucked well away.

It took the bumpy stuff in its stride as well. We didn't mess around with the suspension settings but with five preload and four damping settings on the rear forks there's ample room for manoeuvre. Add the 5.7 psi to 15 to 20 psi adjustment range on the air forks and the Seca will support a variety of weights.

The steering is not particularly quick with those wide bars - you have to give them a heave to change direction in a hurry but the high-speed stability is superb with none of the wallowing associated with big 'uns like the CBX. But in most situations the Seca goes exactly where you aim it.



USEFUL CONTACTS

CLUBS

Yamaha Classic Club,
Mr Hart, Flat 4, 17 Trinity Gardens,
Folkestone, Kent, CT20 2RP.

Yamaha Riders Club,
Christine Kemp, 9 Filland Court,
Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 1HW.

Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club,
PO Box 14, Corwen LL21 9WF.
www.vjmc.com

*"It was **refreshing**
to **take time**, relax,
enjoying the countryside
and then **wind the Sera**
up around **traffic islands**"*



Twin 11.73 inch discs up front with a 7.8 inch drum rear were more than adequate for the Seca's light weight (despite that shaft drive) of 481 lbs.

I must admit, I like the styling and find it preferable to the UK 650.

Those short pipes, LC-style tank and wheels, make up a package that looks different although the rectangular headlamp and console look a little large for the bike.

Overall, the Seca was something of an eye-opener. Not fan of the 'sit up and beg' style of riding, I found this ride a pleasant change from the relatively 'head down, bum up' experience of my own Katana.

It was refreshing to take my time, relax, enjoy the countryside and then wind the Seca up around traffic islands, fast bends of bumpy country lanes with enthusiasm. Like I said at the start, this bike is fun.

Its appearance belies its sporting abilities and the specification, especially that computerised console, gives it some novelty value too. Not that one tester thought the same. He reckoned the novelty of the check list soon wore off.

"Although an eye-catching sales feature it is a novelty that soon wore off," he said. "All very clever, but to my mind completely superfluous."



LC-type styling and wheel design - very different to the XJ650's sportier look for the UK market.

Killjoy. Remember writing that, Brian Tarbox?

And, just for another blast from the past, here's another quote that sums up the Seca for me too. "You get a shaft drive machine that will cruise all day at a ton, starts, stops and corners with the best in its class and has the styling to make most bikes look boring." Thanks, Roland Brown.

Yep, the Seca was a surprise package, a fantastic all-rounder and something a little different from the early Eighties.

Sold for £850 to one lucky man. I bet Gary Hesom regrets it...

Words: Bob Berry
Pictures: Terry Joslin



YAMAHA XJ750

ENGINE

Aircooled four cylinder dohc four stroke, two valves per cylinder. Yamaha Induction Control System. Capacity 748cc. Bore and stroke 65x56.4mm. Compression ratio 9.2:1. Four 32mm Hitachi carburetors. Claimed power, 81 bhp at 7500 rpm. Claimed torque, 48.46 ft/lbs at 7500 rpm.

TRANSMISSION

Primary drive by spur gears, final drive by shaft. Wet multi-plate clutch. Five speed gearbox, ratios: 1st 2.188,

2nd 1.5, 3rd 1.154, 4th 0.933, 5th 0.813.

SUSPENSION

Air-assisted, hydraulically damped front forks with anti-dive. Swingarm rear with adjustable shocks.

ELECTRICS

12 volt, 14 amp/hr battery. 270 watt alternator. Rectangular headlamp with 60/55 amp bulb.

BRAKES

Twin 11.73 inch front discs, 7.8 inch rear drum.

WHEELS

Cast alloy, Bridgestone

3.25 x 19 inch front tyre, 120/90 x 18 rear.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

4.17 gallon tank, overall length 88in, width 33.8in, height 44.4in, seat height 30.7in, ground clearance 5.7in, wheelbase 56.8in, dry weight 481 lbs.

EQUIPMENT

Computerised safety check system, daytime running light, self cancelling indicators, warning lights for neutral, indicators and high beam, safety chain, steering lock, helmet holder, grab rail.



NEXT MONTH - 20 VALVE MAYHEM - YAMAHA FZ750